

Isaiah Chapter 6: The Lord in Glory

The record of 2 Chronicles chapter 26 recounts for our learning certain events to do with the life and times of king Uzziah. His reign was characterised by his zeal for the things of Yahweh:

“he did that which was right in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that his father Amaziah had done ... and as long as he sought Yahweh, **God made him to prosper**” (2 Chron. 26:5).

Again, we read of how Yahweh helped him in his time of faithfulness:

“and Yahweh **helped him** against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-Baal” (Vs 7),

“And his name spread far abroad, for **he was marvellously helped**, till he was strong ...” (vs 15).

Indeed, the name “Uzziah” literally means “my strength is Yah” and epitomised his trust in the God of his fathers for help and strength. However, we find that when he was made strong, he became lifted up in pride:

“but when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for **he transgressed against Yahweh his God**, and went into the temple of Yahweh to burn incense upon the altar of incense” (vs 16).

In the Proverbs, we are warned against such a situation of being lifted up in times of plenty:

“Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: **Lest I be full, and deny thee**, and say, Who is Yahweh? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8-9)

And again:

“Pride goeth **before destruction**, and a haughty spirit **before a fall**” (Prov. 16:18).

In the case of Uzziah, when he was full, he did not say “Who is Yahweh”, but his actions did constitute a trespass against Him. He, a King, went into the temple to burn incense, something which only the priests were permitted to do. He lifted himself up to be a King-Priest without being appointed to that position by Yahweh. So, the end result was that:

“Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests; **the leprosy even rose up in his forehead** before the priests in the house of Yahweh, besides the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests, looked upon him, and behold, **he was leprous in his forehead**, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hastened also to go out, because Yahweh had smitten him. And Uzziah was **a leper unto the day of his death** ...” (2 Chron. 26:19-21).

The High Priest appointed by Yahweh wore a golden plate upon his forehead, which said, “Holiness to Yahweh” (Exo. 28:36-38). But king Uzziah denied the holiness of Yahweh, in drawing near in a way that was not appointed of Him. Hence, in his forehead he instead had leprosy, which was with him until the day he died.

These events form the background to Isaiah chapter 6. The Lord Jesus Christ did not elevate himself to become a priest: he was appointed by Yahweh:

“... so also Christ **glorified not himself** to be made an high priest, but he that spake unto him, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 5:5-6).

The Lord Jesus Christ was appointed as a King-Priest by Yahweh: he did not appoint himself. These principles come out when we consider the circumstances of Isaiah chapter 6, which was given when the leprous king Uzziah died:

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” (Isa. 6:1).

Notice that here, the Lord is sitting upon a royal throne, within a Temple – in other words, he is a king-priest. Moreover, he is not lifted up in pride, but in glory. When the leprous king Uzziah died, this vision of Messiah in Glory was shown to the prophet – and in this vision there was Holiness to Yahweh, with the declaration: “Holy, Holy, Holy is Yahweh of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3).

We are left in no doubt as who this enthroned priest is, for the Apostle John, in quoting from this chapter in Isaiah, specifically tells us it was Jesus: “... these things said Esaias **when he saw his glory, and spake of him ...**” (Jno. 12:41). Other prophets were likewise shown this vision of the future: Zechariah also spoke of him:

“Behold, the man whose name is The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of Yahweh: even he shall build the temple of Yahweh; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule **upon his throne ...**” (Zec. 6:12-13).

Notice, the reference to Messiah as Temple-Builder as well as ruler sitting upon his throne. Again, Ezekiel also wrote of him, in describing the future temple:

“so the Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold the glory of Yahweh filled the house. And I heard him speaking unto me out of the house; and a man stood by me. And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy Name shall the house of Israel no more defile ...” (Ezek. 43:5-7).

Notice the allusions here, which match the description of Isaiah’s vision: the Glory filled the house, the place of a throne in the temple, and the holiness attributed to the Name of Yahweh. Also, a few verses earlier, we read that “the earth shined with his glory” (vs 2), and Isaiah described how that “... the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3). What a glorious vision of the majesty of Israel’s redeemer this is!

In this vision of Messiah’s Glory, Isaiah saw how that the Lord is not alone. There are living entities, described as “seraphim” who proclaim the holiness of Yahweh in the house:

“... above him stood **the Seraphim**: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:2-3).

The Hebrew word for “Seraphim” is the same word as that translated “fiery serpents” in Numbers chapter 21, verses 6 and 8, as follows:

“And Yahweh sent **fiery serpents** among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died

... And Yahweh said unto Moses, Make thee a **fiery serpent**, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live” (Num. 21:6,8)

These serpents represented the judgments of Yahweh upon the disobedience of the people. So the Apostle Paul gives us the admonition:

“Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents ...” (1 Cor. 10:10).

The destruction of the serpent bite, therefore, describes the consequence of the sins of the people – and in *type* it speaks of that which has the power of death – even sin itself. It speaks of the *diabolos*, which condemns us to the grave through sin (Heb. 2:14). So we read that the lifting up of the Brazen Serpent speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ being lifted up with the same sin-nature as ourselves:

“... and **as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness**, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved ...” (Jno. 3:14-17).

The fiery serpents were sent to condemn the Israelitish world, but the lifting up of the brazen serpent was out of the love of Yahweh, in order that the afflicted could be saved through the eye of faith. In the lifting up of the Son of Man, we can be saved from the serpent bite, even as it is written:

“ ... death is swallowed up in victory. O death, **where is thy sting?** O grave, **where is thy victory?** The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ ...” (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

The sting of death is neutralised in the lifting up of the Lord Jesus Christ. But notice the language used here: “lifting up” contrasts with the lifting up in pride of king Uzziah, and the lifting up in glory as described of our redeemer in Isaiah chapter 6. He was lifted up in his humiliation, in humbleness to his Father’s Will. He is able to save us from the serpent’s bite, if we but look upon him in faith and hope.

In Isaiah 6, the Seraphim are the means by which the earth shall be filled with the holiness and glory of Yahweh. As we have seen, they declare the principles of “Holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3). So they will be the agents of Yahweh’s judgement upon the world, like in the days of the Israelites of old. And salvation will be accomplished by having faith in the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up in glory.

But salvation could only come to those who “looked” to the serpent of brass. There is an emphasis of having a *vision* of our Master. This comes out again in Isaiah chapter 6:

- “In the year that King Uzziah died, **I saw** also the Lord” (vs 1)

- “mine eyes **have seen** the king ...” (vs 5)
- ... “lest they **see with their eyes**, and hear with their ears ...” (vs 9)

Even so the inspired writer to the Hebrews emphasises how we also should “see” the Lord:

“... let us run with patience the race that is set before us, **looking unto Jesus** the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:1-2).

This was the example of the worthies of old: they died in faith seeing the fulfilment of the promises, even though they were far off in terms of time (see Heb. 11:13). We also must have a spiritual vision: seeing the invisible through the eyes of faith.

There is another aspect that emerges from a consideration of Isaiah chapter 6. That is, the willingness of the prophet to do his Lord’s bidding:

“... and I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said **I Here am I, send me ...**” (Isa. 6:8).

Immediately upon hearing that there was a need for a volunteer to be sent in the Lord’s service, Isaiah demonstrated a wonderful willingness to discharge his duty as a prophet. This is example of so many of the worthies of old. Consider for instance Samuel: “Here am I” (1 Sam. 3:4). And again, “speak, Yahweh, for thy servant heareth” (vs 9). And compare this with faithless example of Israel:

“... but this thing I commanded them, saying, obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people, and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you. But **they hearkened not, nor inclined the ear**, but walked in the counsel and in the imaginations of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward” (Jer. 7:23-24).

The willing example of the prophet foreshadows the example of our Master:

“For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed **that thou didst send me**” (Jno. 12:8)

“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father **has sent me, even so I send you ...**” (Jno. 20:21).

Jesus was “sent” by his Father to accomplish great works in His Name, and it is through his example of presenting himself faultless before the Throne of Glory, that we can also have hope.

In considering Isaiah 6 therefore, we have many strands of exhortation. There is the theme of not being lifted up in pride, going beyond our station. The principle that it is Yahweh who shall lift up the believers at the appointed time. We must have a vision of the future, and the spiritual sight to behold the Master’s glory. And we have the principle of being willing to serve, just like the prophets of old. All of those things we see in Messiah himself, who was a willing sacrifice to lay down his life for his friends, and his friends are we, if we hold fast to, and perform his commandments.

Christopher Maddocks